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FOREWORD

By LORD MESTON

President of the Le Play Society

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LET US ASK OURSELVES—students, busy workers, travellers, ordinary newspaper-reading stay-at-homes, whoever we are —what do we know about Roumania? Extraordinarily little, would be the honest answer of most of us. We know that Roumania was our ally in the Great War, and picked up some territory thereby. We believe that her language is nearer to Latin than any other European vernacular. We remember that her map is dotted with romantically-named provinces—Bessarabia, Moldavia, Transylvania and others. But there we halt. Encyclopaedias would tell us more, but encyclopaedias are dull things. Here is a little book without a dull page, which nevertheless tells us a very great deal.

It is the work of members of the Le Play Society, who employed a holiday tour in seeing Roumania for themselves. Trained observers most of them, they brought back a collection of fresh, first-hand studies of the country and its life. They show us the land as it now is, built up from its geological past. They tell us of the peoples who have dwelt in it since pre-historic times; of the tribes which have poured backwards and forwards across it; of the folk who inhabit it now, of their usages, their faiths and their social life. We learn about the agriculture of the land, its industries, its mineral resources, and its economic limits. Its trees and flowers and cottage gardens are described; its climate, and the gala dress of its peasantry. There are no politics, but one gets a glimpse of how political change has reacted on rural life and prosperity.

Running through all the various studies, and linking them together, is a thread which each of the workers recognises as of the essence of the pattern. That thread is the special interest of the geographer in all that he sees, his capacity

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for tracking the constant inter-relation between Man and Nature. Without claiming, as has been claimed, that Geography is the oldest of the sciences, he follows its guidance in the sure confidence that it will explain the life and activities of a country as no other single science can do. Hence his affection for "regional studies," such as this of Roumania. Hence his ready appreciation of much in a country's anthropology, sociology, economics, which would otherwise be isolated and undigested knowledge.

This is the *raison d'être* of the Le Play Society. It has now produced a series of these small handbooks, all based on original expert observation on the spot, clothing the dry bones of the old geographies with the flesh and blood of life and its story. As contributions to our knowledge of the world, and as companions to the more formal text-books, they ought to be of special value to teachers and students; and they may safely be used as models for other regional work, whether on a similar or on a less ambitious scale. Those who find the handbooks helpful may wish to make the closer acquaintance of the Society and its methods.

There is another aspect of the Society's work which appeals strongly to me personally. Having watched for years the *va et vient* at Geneva, where men and women of different nations are constantly mixing in work and in pleasure, I cannot overstate the value of kindly human intercourse as a solvent of international problems. Barriers have to be broken down before mankind get to know and understand their fellows: and there is nothing for levelling barriers like crossing frontiers. Friendly excursions such as those of the Le Play groups, intent only on studying and understanding the ways of other peoples and their problems, can do great good. To show interest in other people's lives is surely to generate mutual sympathy; and mutual sympathy is the only sure foundation for world peace. All success therefore to the Le Play Society and its members.

MESTON